
United States Air Force International Affairs Specialist Program

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Today's dynamic security environment and expeditionary nature of air and space operations require a cadre of the United States Air Force (USAF) commissioned officers with international insight, foreign language proficiency, and cultural appreciation. These Airmen give the Air Force the required capability and depth in foreign area expertise and language skills to successfully sustain coalitions, pursue regional stability, and contribute to multi-national operations.

The International Affairs Specialist (IAS) Program offers commissioned Air Force officers exciting opportunities to learn and fully develop these key military skills applicable to the 21st century international security arena. Through a competitive process, candidates, officers at the mid-career point will be selected, assiduously developed, and employed in demanding international and politico-military assignments as international affairs specialists. These officers' career progression will be carefully managed so that they, while developing a strong foundation in international affairs, will remain viable and competitive in their primary career fields. The expertise that will be brought by IAS officers will prove to be a boon to Air Force expeditionary operations around the world.

Humble Beginnings

The Air Force Foreign Area Officer (FAO) Program was created in 1997, in response to the Department of Defense (DoD) Directive 1315.17, *Military Department Foreign Area Officer Programs*, which directed each military branch to create formal FAO programs that meet service-specific needs. The Air Force's program identified and tracked officers who possessed the cultural and linguistic skills for the potential to serve in FAO positions. However, no formal commitment existed to deliberately create or manage a well-trained cadre of officers with the regional expertise needed to effectively support DoD and Air Force global mission requirements. Key challenges that hampered the USAF FAO Program included the following:

- Lack of deliberate development. A viable FAO career track did not exist.
- No utilization leverage. No management priority was given in the primary career field assignment prioritization plans to ensure that FAOs were available or assignable.
- Heavy reliance on individual officers' self-obtained skills. With no formal training program, the viability and capabilities of the FAO cadre relied heavily on the individual officers' own initiative in developing their international outlook, language skills, and cultural appreciation.
- Career killer perception. Because there was no viable career track and little or no formal recognition of international skills as a critical warfighting enabler, the decision to be a foreign area officer was perceived as a career-ending move.

The 28 April 2005, revision to DoD Directive 1315.17, requires services to deliberately develop a corps of FAOs with the in-depth international skills required to represent the DoD in the conduct of politico-military activities and execution of military-diplomatic missions with foreign governments and military establishments. Consistent with the more demanding requirements of the new directive and the USAF *Force Development* concept, Air Force officers will now be deliberately developed (selected, trained, assigned, and retained) under the new IAS Program.

International Affairs Specialist Program Concept

Under the IAS Program, officers are competitively selected for IAS development at mid-career (typically at seven to twelve years commissioned service) and receive formal training and education with an appropriate follow-on assignments on one of two distinct development paths. Most will do this as a politico-military affairs strategist (PAS) in a well-managed, single career broadening

opportunity to gain international politico-military affairs experience. Others will engage in a more demanding developmental opportunity as a regional affairs strategist (RAS) formerly titled the Foreign Area Officers, with multiple IAS assignments designed to create a true regional expert possessing professional language skills. Both IAS paths are intended to be career-enhancing.

Politico-military affairs strategist (PAS, AFSC 16P). The PAS development opportunity is specifically geared to give our future senior leaders valuable politico-military (pol-mil) education and experience through a single, well-managed developmental assignment opportunity. PAS development occurs in conjunction with selection for Intermediate Developmental Education (IDE), typically around the ten to twelve year point in commissioned service. Officers designated on this IAS development path undertake a one-year pol-mil-oriented IDE program to receive an international affairs related advanced degree. IDE programs for this include the Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) with the pol-mil elective course; Naval Postgraduate School (NPS); English-speaking foreign staff colleges; or the USAF Political-Military Advisor (POLAD) Internship. PAS-designates will then serve in an international pol-mil affairs assignment on their first or second post-IDE assignment. Further developmental opportunities on the PAS track may be available as determined by the primary career field

functional development team and the needs of the Air Force. Based on current requirements to fill 260 PAS positions (O-4 through O-6), 100 officers will be selected and trained through IDE as a PAS each year. To meet the current shortfall, well-qualified officers with an international affairs-focused advanced degree who did not accomplish IDE in-residence can also be used to fill PAS requirements, as determined by development teams.

Regional affairs strategist (RAS, AFSC 16F). Using a dual career path concept, the RAS development opportunity is geared toward creating a cadre of officers

Regional Affairs Strategist (RAS)

Rated:

Foreign IDE — RTF — EUCOM/J-5 — Sq CC — SDE — Gp CC or AIRA — DATT or JCS/J-5 or Wg CC — SAF/IA											
8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	28	30

Non-rated:

IDE (NPS + DLI)	SAO	HAF	Sq CC	Foreign SDE	Gp CC or AIRA	DATT or JCS/J-5 or Wg CC	OSD or HAF				
8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	28	30

Pol-Mil Affairs Strategist (PAS)

Rated:

ACSC — SAF/IA — RTF — Sq CC — SDE — Gp CC or POLAD — PACOM — JCS/J-5 or Wg CC — PACAF or HAF											
8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	28	30

Non-rated:

IDE – EUCOM/J5 – HAF – Sq CC – SDE – SAF/IA – Wg CC – USAF/A2 – DIA – ACC/IN or POLAD or AF/XOI											
8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	28	30

Career Path Examples

with in-depth regional expertise. RAS development ideally begins within the seven to twelve year commissioned service window. Officers designated on this IAS development path typically will complete a two-year education and training program, with variations due to foreign language training requirements. These rigorous programs include a regionally-focused advanced degree (area studies, international affairs, national security studies, etc), language studies, and in some cases, advanced language training through in-country immersion. RAS-designates then gain in-depth international experience and professional-level language skills by serving alternating assignments between their primary career field and IAS. Ideally, where possible, these assignments will be combined such that an assignment in a primary career field-related position occurs within the regional affairs officer's geographic area of specialization. This allows continued development of RAS skills while serving in the primary career field and provides an officer with international insight and skills to complement primary career field duties. This more demanding, dual career track must be carefully managed to ensure officers remain competitive and viable in both their primary career field and IAS career paths.

Based on current requirements to fill 250 RAS positions (O-4 through O-6), fifty-nine officers will be selected and trained as a RAS each year.

Implementation of the IAS Program will be accomplished using a three-year “ramp-up” to ease the impact on career fields. In the first selection process (PAS selection was completed this past summer 2005, and, at the time of this article’s submission for publication, RAS selection is scheduled for fall 2005), approximately 50 percent, 50 PAS and 25 RAS of the actual selection and training requirements will be filled. In 2006, selection and training requirements will be increased to 75 percent and finally to 100 percent in the following years. Success of the IAS Program depends on the selection of the right officers and a carefully managed and deliberate career molding by the primary career field functional development teams, the Air Force International Affairs Secretariat (SAF/IA, as the career field manager), and the Air Force Personnel Center. Just like other developmental assignment opportunities, IAS development is geared to complement primary career field development, creating officers with essential international skills to enable expeditionary air and space operations.

The Air Force is determined to create these skills in our most competitive officers and make this a highly desired developmental path. Through well-established IAS requirements, there is a viable career path for IAS officers to general officer. Currently, several USAF international affairs related positions exist for general officers. Major general (O-8) billets include the Assistant Deputy Under Secretary of the Air Force (International Affairs), chief of the Office of Defense Cooperation (Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt), and commander of the Air Force Security Assistance Center. Also, the positions of defense attaché in China and Russia (rotational among the Services) and Director of Regional Affairs in the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of the Air Force (International Affairs) exist for brigadier generals (O-7s).

The Air Force Reserve (AFRES) and Air National Guard (ANG) portions of the Total Force IAS concept require further discussion and development. To ensure successful Total Force IAS Program implementation, the Reserve and Guard components are currently developing implementation strategies meeting DoD requirements that fit with their unique missions and organizational structures.

While IAS implementation is proceeding at an aggressive pace, the full benefit of the transformation will take a decade or more to achieve. The first officers selected this year will begin training in 2006, and with IAS developmental assignments after training will eventually become the regional experts that the Air Force needs to conduct its global operations. Additionally, it will take several years for the required culture change to fully take hold. Long term IAS program success will depend on continued senior leader support, emphasizing this capability as a crucial mission enabler, promoting IAS as a viable secondary career path to competitive officers, and recognizing the value of these skills on promotion boards. Despite challenges, the goal is clear: develop professional Airmen with international insight, foreign language proficiency, and cultural understanding and appreciation. These skills represent crucial force multipliers that will significantly increase the effectiveness of air and space power.

About the Author

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